

***SSAAM***  
***Submission to the Manitoba Government***  
***K-12 Education Review***

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A report compiled on behalf of the  
Student Services Administrators' Association of Manitoba  
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The following submission to the Manitoba Government K-12 Education Review is made on behalf of the Student Services Administrators' Association of Manitoba (SSAAM) Executive and six of its regional sub-committees located throughout the province. SSAAM is an organization whose mandate is to advance appropriate educational programming opportunities for all students through advocacy, promotion of best practices and collaboration. Membership in SSAAM is open to those educators whose primary duties or responsibilities are in the area of student services, or for those who support other staff working with special education students. Currently SSAAM has a membership of 85 individuals, actively representing school divisions in the province. SSAAM recently celebrated forty years of working to improve the educational lives of Manitoba's children and youth with exceptional needs (SSAAM, 2019). SSAAM is proud of what has been accomplished with educational partners including, the Manitoba Association of School Business Officials (MASBO), Manitoba Association of Parent Councils (MAPC), Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS), Manitoba Education and Training (MET), Manitoba School Boards Association (MSBA), and the Manitoba Teachers' Society (MTS).

In preparation for this submission, the SSAAM Executive and its regional committees provided input and recommendations on the suggested questions, to focus the broad dialogue in education regarding the following topics: Long-term vision, Student learning; Teaching; Accountability for student learning; Governance; and Funding. An appreciative inquiry method was used to consolidate the thinking of the SSAAM executive and its membership to complete the following steps:

- i. Determine the context and foundation on which the province moves forward.
- ii. Recommend aspects of education which are successful and should be sustained.
- iii. Vision critical priorities and essential actions to shift the province from current practice to future success.

**i. Context and Foundation**

- a) SSAAM fully supports the Philosophy of Inclusion (Manitoba Public Schools Act C.C.S.M. c. P250) and acknowledges its critical role in setting the foundation and context for the future of equitable and accessible education in the province:

*“Inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that allows every individual to feel accepted, valued, and safe. An inclusive community consciously evolves to meet the changing needs of its members. Through recognition and support, an inclusive community provides meaningful involvement and equal access to the benefits of citizenship.*

*In Manitoba, we embrace inclusion as a means of enhancing the well-being of every member of the community. By working together, we strengthen our capacity to provide the foundation for a richer future for all of us.”*

- b) SSAAM strongly advocates for a student-centered approach, referring to the wide variety of educational programming, learning opportunities, instructional methods and strategies, which are intended to address the distinct needs, interests, aspirations, orientations, cultural background, and voice of all students.
- c) SSAAM emphasizes the significance of learning (gaining knowledge and skill) and achievement (ability to demonstrate learning and skill) for all students regardless of ability, and the importance of all students participating in the curriculum to the fullest extent that is both positive and possible.
- d) SSAAM highlights the importance of educational programming for all students of varying abilities and endorses dynamic and interactive approaches that involve cohesive and coordinated teamwork and collaboration among educators, students and parents.
- e) SSAAM recognizes the huge impact of poverty on academic outcomes, social emotional learning, mental health and well-being of all students, and upholds the commitment to equity in education as part of a broader social support network to develop productive citizens and enhance quality of life for all.

### ii. Recommendations: Aspects of education which are successful and should be sustained

#### 1. Long-Term Vision: What should the goals and purpose of K-12 be in a rapidly changing world?

When responding to this question, SSAAM considered the goals and purpose of K-12 education in a rapidly changing world. The main work of schools to educate children and youth to become responsible citizens has remained largely unchanged over the years in Canada. What has changed however is the practice and process of education, largely reflecting the context, conditions and pressures of a changing world. For example, there is an ongoing contrast between the need for improved performance by students in light of global competition for employment and wealth, yet schools at the same time must enhance students' attitudes, develop expanded values and improve social emotional well-being (Wallin, Levin & Young, 2014). The ability for students to excel in areas of literacy, numeracy, and information technology, while at the same time being adaptable, flexible, thinking critically, working collaboratively and having strong emotional intelligence is fundamental in a diverse and rapidly changing world. The journey for Manitoba schools and school divisions is largely reflective of this path.

Manitoba has one of the highest rates of children in care in the world. High rates of children in care are indicative of unacceptable living conditions such as poverty, poor housing, parenting difficulties and family dysfunction (Brownell, Chartier, Au, MacWilliam, Schultz, Guenette & Valdivia, 2015). According to Brownell et al., there is also an over-representation of Indigenous children in care in the province. While they comprise approximately one quarter of Manitoba's youth, Indigenous children represent 90% of the total number of children in care. Additionally, data from Manitoba Education and Training's four year Manitoba student-tracked high school graduation rate, showed Aboriginal students graduating at approximately half the rate of their non-Aboriginal peers. In 2015, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) highlighted the importance of identifying and understanding differences of this

nature, in their call to eliminate the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. SSAAM supports the key role of education in reconciling this difference. Manitoba schools have also become sites of growing, learning and belonging for the large number of new Canadians who have immigrated to the province. Many of the students new to Canada have English as an additional language, and some of those students are refugees who have experienced trauma from war affected backgrounds.

Accordingly, in light of the diversity in Manitoba schools and when education is discussed, SSAAM believes that engagement and discourse must include the priorities of equity, inclusion, mental health and well-being.

A key challenge identified for the future, involves the need to conceptualize student success in Manitoba beyond that of academic achievement alone and beyond the traditional indicators of literacy and numeracy. In saying this, the presenting diversity that demands change does not only refer to children with exceptional needs. It encompasses all children, their personalities, ethnicities, languages, family structures and learning styles. It is human” (Katz, 2012). SSAAM as an organization is leading educators in the province to explore an enhanced definition of student success to reflect the provincial context, and at the same time identify data which will inform the achievement for all students. In Manitoba, the Public Schools Amendment Act (Appropriate Educational Programming) proclaimed in 2005, provides the regulation to guide policy and programming for all students. In particular it ensures that all students, regardless of ability, ethnicity or privilege, receive the appropriate educational programming they require. Accompanying standards provide school divisions with a framework to use in developing local policy for appropriate educational programming. SSAAM believes that the sustainability of this legislation and accompanying standards is essential for the continued success of education in the province of Manitoba.

## **2. Student Learning: What are the conditions required to achieve excellence in student achievement and outcomes in Manitoba?**

In the *Report on Literacy and Numeracy in Manitoba* (2019), the province states that diversity must be valued and different ways of learning supported through addressing strengths, challenges, needs and capabilities of individual students. SSAAM concurs that responding to the diversity of all learners is required to achieve excellence and equity in student achievement in Manitoba. SSAAM acknowledges that literacy and numeracy are fundamental across the lives of students, but that considerable variations exist when data on student learning is considered by geographic area or by student characteristics.

Achieving equity in literacy and numeracy outcomes for all students therefore requires intentional planning and action to differentiate, adapt, or modify curriculum learning expectations and respond to the unique needs of diverse learners. SSAAM advocates for continued partnerships with parents and families in establishing goals for students as part of the student specific planning process. SSAAM also emphasizes the fundamental importance of student agency to enhance curricular engagement and accessibility, especially when students have voice and choice in establishing learning opportunities as part of the instructional and planning process (Moore, 2018). SSAAM also endorses the continued right for students who benefit from educational programming to be supported until age 21.

SSAAM advocates for the use of data collection mechanisms such as student, classroom, grade band and school profiles to provide comprehensive and concise written descriptions of current levels of student performance across various settings. This is the first step in collecting evidence on student achievement to ensure that appropriate educational programming occurs and a student specific plan is developed to address differences or gaps in student learning.

The Manitoba Centre for Health Policy (MCHP) reminds us, however that the province must go beyond educators to get to the root causes of inconsistency in student performance data. In 2014

Brownell and Nickel found that 86 per cent of Manitoba's students performed at expected levels in Math, Reading and Science, attributing 14 percent to those who did not due to poverty and family dysfunction. There is vast literature which indicates that educational outcomes for children and youth strongly correlate with socioeconomic status. In fact, socioeconomic status is the single most powerful predictor of educational outcomes (Brownell, Fransoo & Martins, 2016). Effectively, SSAAM believes that achieving excellence for all students in Manitoba requires sustained efforts to enhance partnerships with clinician services and community agencies to ensure greater and more equitable access to supports and in the areas of health, mental health, social housing, early childhood education and care, as well as recreational programming. SSAAM also promotes continued coordination and integration of systems and services (Ministries of Education and Training; Health, Seniors and Active Living; Justice; and Families) to collaborate in addressing the complex needs of students as they arise, especially when needs extend beyond those typically supported in an education setting.

### **3. Teaching: How can teachers and school leaders become most effective?**

Strong leadership is required across the education system to model, encourage and support responsive instructional practices and activate system-wide improvement. SSAAM promotes a leadership role that focuses on instruction, rather than diluting this crucial responsibility with managerial tasks. SSAAM agrees that educational leaders set high expectations for learning, and sustain effective communities that are aligned with school division and provincial priorities.

School and system leaders in education are second only to teachers who engage in effective, universally designed instructional practices to meet the needs of all learners. SSAAM emphasizes the importance for teachers across grade levels to be supported in developing the confidence, content, cultural proficiency and pedagogy they need to instruct diverse learners. This requires on-going intentional efforts towards professional development that is differentiated and reflective of the needs of

teachers, the stages in their learning and the contexts in which they practice. Professional learning needs to move beyond one-shot, ballroom style delivery and shift into regular, job-embedded, collaborative inquiry that is practiced in schools and classrooms on a daily basis (Lipton & Wellman, 2012; Katz, Dack & Malloy, 2017).

SSAAM advocates for a greater classroom experience component with a high-quality, cooperating teacher as part of pre-service preparation in tandem with university study. SSAAM also acknowledges the importance of mentorship and support for teachers who are new to school divisions and to the profession. In many jurisdictions this includes a supervision component, mentorship programming and residencies or internships around certain topics, which occur with more experienced teachers (although residencies as part of professional learning are not limited to new teachers exclusively).

SSAAM maintains that the current environment of collaboration and cooperation between provincial education partner organizations in Manitoba (MASBO, MAPC, MASS, MET, MSBA, MTS and SSAAM) is essential to creating the climate required for continuous improvement in the areas of inclusion and diversity. Consistent with this belief is the commitment to Manitoba Education and Training's Framework for Continuous Improvement. SSAAM supports the goal of this framework to increase the capacity and capability of the K-12 system to close achievement gaps through the alignment of planning and reporting, the promotion of inclusive practice, the collection and analysis of student achievement data to inform universally designed instructional practice, and the enhancement of instructional leadership. SSAAM advocates for the continuation of Manitoba Education and Training's Review and Reporting Process, as a means to support school divisions in their efforts to address and take responsibility for the learning requirements of students with additional needs.

#### **4. Accountability for student learning: How can the education system develop a stronger sense of shared accountability for student learning?**

Manitoba Education and Training indicate in their mission statement (2019) that they endeavor “to ensure that all Manitoba’s children and youth have access to an array of educational opportunities such that every learner experiences success through relevant, engaging and high quality educational opportunities that prepare them for lifelong learning and citizenship in a democratic, socially just and sustainable society.” In order to gauge this vision, the province gathers information on high school graduation rates and other student achievement statistics (including provincial assessments and student report card data). SSAAM advocates that the education system keep in mind “triangulation of assessment”, not only considering products such as provincial assessment results and report card data, but also including conversations about and observations of student progress in the measurement of student achievement. SSAAM also supports the consideration of school-based data to determine local need, with analysis of the results to inform future practice as delineated in the *K-12 Framework for Continuous Improvement*.

SSAAM supports a common, universally designed provincial report card which reflects the diversity of learning in the province. The current provincial report card was developed in consultation with parents and educators, including representatives of teachers, parent councils, school business officials, superintendents and school boards. In spite of the clarity and commonality envisioned by this team, ambiguity for teachers and parents remains in the reporting process. SSAAM notes that while the reporting mechanism seems obvious for students working through regular curriculum at assigned grade levels, there is inconsistency in teachers’ interpretation and use of the ordinal (1-4) grading scale on the report card. There is also confusion about how teachers document progress for students whose learning goals are significantly different than grade-level curricular expectations. SSAAM recognizes that

there has been discussion about the proposed development of a separate provincial document known as the Individual Education Plan – Report (IEP-R), intended to communicate progress for students who are working on learning goals outside the regular curriculum. While this initiative appears progressive in nature, it is evidence to the fact that the provincial report card is not a universally designed document, nor fully inclusive of all students in Manitoba. Furthermore, SSAAM believes the proposed IEP-R will not assist in responding to the confusion that teachers are currently experiencing when documenting progress for students working outside of regular grade level curriculum (e.g., a student working on grade 5 mathematics learning expectations when enrolled in grade 9). As a result, communication of progress and accountability for all students in Manitoba does not fully exist in practice.

Data in terms of student achievement encompass one priority area, however other K-12 priority areas noted by Manitoba Education and Training are, equity and inclusion; citizenship, sustainability and wellbeing; and public engagement. Stiglitz, Sen & Fitoussi (2010) indicate that in a performance oriented society, metrics matter: What we measure, largely affects what we do. Falkenberg (2015) in comparing measurement and accountability programs in national and international assessments argues for consideration beyond measuring student outcomes on narrow metrics. He suggests that if educators are solely to concentrate on language, mathematics and science, students may be worse off in terms of their well-being or how well they are prepared to live. SSAAM agrees with Falkenberg and supports the step by Manitoba Education and Training to focus not only on student achievement, but also to address the other critical priorities of equity, inclusion, citizenship, sustainability and wellbeing. This is an important shift in the provincial discourse toward measuring the significant contextual factors that surround student achievement. SSAAM believes that it is critical to have a provincial benchmark assessment process which reflects all critical priority areas and also accounts for the diversity of learners in the province.

SSAAM acknowledges the need for shared accountability for student learning, but advocates for the language of shared responsibility. In general, responsibility is shared by parents, guardians and families whose role it is ensure that children and youth are ready to learn and are in attendance for educational programming on a regular basis. Community agencies may be involved and assist in planning and programming, depending on the degree or nature of student needs. Children and youth with complex needs often require supports and services from a number of different disciplines (e.g., education, family services, mental health, health, justice, recreation). Rather than being driven by the mandates of respective departments or agencies, SSAAM advocates for involvement of multiple disciplines in service provision, based on the needs of the children or youth. Models such as the Circle of Care and Wraparound Approach are examples of successful multi-disciplinary processes designed to be student-focused, supportive and assist in sharing responsibility between systems when planning for students with complex needs. SSAAM fully endorses the development of such mechanisms which enable integrated, collaborative and coordinated ways of working more effectively across organizations, disciplines, mandates and structures.

### **5. Governance: What type of governance structures are needed to create a coordinated and relevant education system?**

In Manitoba, as in most other provinces, the provincial government has delegated a significant portion of education governance to locally-elected school boards. The primary role of a school board is to govern schools under its jurisdiction in accordance with all legal requirements, while at the same reflecting community beliefs and values. According to the Manitoba School Boards Association (2019), school boards ensure that communities have input in public education, and they help build the economic and social strength of communities by building strong public schools. In consultation with its staff and community, a school board establishes divisional priorities and goals, which are reflected in an

annual budget. Given that funding from the province pays for only a portion of budgeted expenditures, the school board must determine how much additional revenue will be required to balance its budget. This revenue is generated by special levy, a property tax imposed by school boards in support of local schools. The school board sets the special levy at a rate that will provide the funds needed to fill the gap between what the province provides and what the budget requires.

SSAAM acknowledges the inequity in funding opportunities given the model of taxation currently delegated to school boards. The assessed values of properties can often fluctuate in a school division, as can student enrolment numbers. Both of these factors have a significant impact on the funding a school division receives from the province, and on a school division's ability to generate revenues through the special levy. Provincial and local economic conditions can also dictate against tax increases, whereas community priorities and perspectives may demand new programs or increased service levels. While some school divisions enjoy a strong tax base, others do not. This results in numerous school boards having to prioritize based on political and economic rationale rather than on student need, ultimately determining programming and services that students will go without

SSAAM advocates for equitable structures in taxation such that there can be local input into programming requirements based on evidence of student population and composition in a school division, rather than on assessed values of property. This requires triangulation of benchmark data (e.g., measures of student achievement in literacy and numeracy, equity and inclusion, citizenship, sustainability and well-being) which provides a holistic and enhanced understanding of student needs and strengths. Allocation and distribution of funds are then based on local data compared with defined indicators of need. SSAAM believes that a shift in the taxation process to one more reflective and responsive to evidence of student need, removes barriers and provides all Manitoba students with the appropriate educational programming that they require.

**6. Funding: What actions are required to ensure that the education system is sustainable and provides equitable learning opportunities for all children and youth?**

SSAAM as an organizational partner on the Provincial Task Force on Special Needs Funding (2015) upholds the decision to shift from categorical funding (with a funding application) for students with special needs to a formula based system. This change is fully supported as attitudes and practices about inclusion evolved over time and it became apparent that existing funding structures had become outdated. Manitoba was one of the last provinces in Canada to adopt a formula funding model. The Provincial Task Force recommended the formula based model in an effort to improve services to students, improve student outcomes, provide efficiencies, reflect research, provide stability for budgetary purposes, equitably reflect and respond to community characteristics, focus on student strengths and allow for flexibility, transparency and holistic thinking.

When the Minister of Education adopted the recommendation from the Task Force to shift from categorical to formula funding, the understanding existed that a formula would be developed to ensure that all school divisions could access (at minimum) the same amount of funding that they had been receiving previously for the education of students with additional support needs. With an election looming at the time, however, a change in government occurred and the proposed formula was not created. School divisions are in fact currently being provided with similar amounts as had been allocated in 2016-17. Additionally, there is no uniform process for the distribution of formula based funds. Effectively, school divisions are using many different versions of data collection mechanisms such as classroom, grade band and school profiles to distribute funding to schools based on student needs. The development of standard provincial templates of profile documents would be highly beneficial in terms of consolidation of data and provision of consistent information, allowing school divisions to monitor the

achievement of students with additional support needs and provide resources based on commonly identified criteria.

School divisions have noted the benefit inherent with the new formula funding model. In particular, SSAAM members spoke about the advantage of autonomy for decision making based on local needs within communities. This autonomy has allowed school divisions and schools to purchase resources and supports that are specific to student needs which exceed typical provincial averages or scenarios. The shift in funding has enabled flexibility to choose personnel who are most qualified to work with students who have the greatest challenges. For example, schools have now been able to use funds to access additional co-teachers, clinician supports, mental health workers, and addictions workers, placing this support within classrooms and schools themselves to build capacity for working with students who have additional learning needs. Currently school divisions receive provincial funding for students with additional learning needs based on enrollment numbers on September 30<sup>th</sup> of each year. In future, it will be helpful for funding to be allocated based on several key points during the school year given the variability and transiency of the student population.

**iii) Vision: Critical priorities and essential actions to shift the province from current practice to future success.**

Based on the foregoing discussion the SSAAM Executive and its six regional sub-committees identified general priorities and essential actions to shift the province from current practice to future success with respect to the advancement of appropriate educational programming opportunities for all students.

SSAAM recommends to the Manitoba Government K-12 Education Review that:

1. Manitoba Education and Training ensure a common provincial vision of shared expectations regarding education, based on the Public Schools Act, which legislates that all students are entitled to receive appropriate educational programming that fosters student participation in the personal, intellectual and social aspects of school life, enabling students to achieve quality of life and become productive and contributing members of society.
2. Teacher preparation, professional development, and learning (both pre-service and in service) prioritize, the value of instructional design for all learners, the use of responsive teaching strategies and interventions based on data informed decisions and evidence-based practices, and the implementation of authentic planning for communities of diversity.
3. Students in Manitoba schools are taught using strategic inclusive instruction whereby universal supports for the provincial curriculum are designed prior to teaching and can be obtained by students at any point in time, to reduce barriers, self-regulate their learning, create the conditions for equitable access to curricular learning expectations, and reinforce that all can learn.
4. Manitoba Education and Training (MET) update the current provincial report card, accompanying handbook and related technology templates, in a manner that is universally designed and accessible, to more effectively communicate the progress of all students in Manitoba and to accurately represent the context of learning in the province for purposes of data collection to inform ongoing resourcing and support.

SSAAM recommends to the Manitoba Government K-12 Education Review that:

5. Manitoba Education and Training (MET) concentrate on the critical priorities that it has identified, yet delve deeper into a specific area of improvement to strategically and effectively reduce gaps in that area of student achievement, align professional development and learning opportunities, focus and balance benchmark assessment processes at the international, provincial and local levels, as well as, invest time and resources to obtain data which is informative for and inclusive of all students.
6. The province create protocols and shared funding agreements between the Ministries of Education and Training; Health, Seniors and Active Living; Justice; and Families, in order to respond to and support students who have complex needs (beyond that of education) and require sustainable resources and equitable learning opportunities that can be most effectively obtained through multisystem involvement.
7. The quality and value of cohesive collaboration and communication that currently exists between educational partners in the province of Manitoba (MASBO, MAPC, MASS, MET, MSBA, MTS, and SSAAM) is acknowledged and celebrated as a key strength in honoring the necessary conditions to respond to diverse learners, reduce gaps in student achievement, and implement the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

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